

Millthorpe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121706
Local Authority	York
Inspection number	314087
Inspection dates	6–7 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Tanya Harber-Stuart HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1002
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Polly Griffith
Headteacher	Mr Tony Wootton
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2004
School address	Nunthorpe Avenue York North Yorkshire YO23 1WF
Telephone number	01904 686400
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Millthorpe School is a larger than average school serving the western area of York. Most of the students at the school are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. Nearly a fifth of the students have a learning difficulty and/or disability. The percentage of students who have a statement of special educational needs is low and has fallen in the last three years. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is considerably below the national average. The percentage of students who enter or leave the school other than at age 11 is below average.

Millthorpe is a specialist language college, has recently been awarded specialist status in science and has achieved the International Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Millthorpe School provides a satisfactory standard of education. Strengths of provision are the good pastoral care and support given to the students, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Students enter and leave the school with standards which are broadly in line with the national average. This represents satisfactory progress overall, although not all boys of average ability make the progress they should. The school has undergone a period of change in the past two years with experienced members of staff leaving, a budget deficit and a series of building projects to develop provision. Recent appointments have further strengthened an established staff and provide a stable platform to build on the suitable strategies it has recently put in place.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Successful outcomes of the provision are the healthy lifestyles which the students adopt and the contribution they make to the community. The students are offered a wide range of enrichment opportunities and extra-curricular activities, especially physical education, and participation rates are high. The school council makes a significant contribution to the school through regular attendance at governors meetings. Students report that when an incident of bullying happens it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Students' behaviour in classrooms and around the school is satisfactory. The new attendance policy has reduced the number of unauthorised absences and levels of attendance are satisfactory and improving.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students enjoy most lessons, particularly when they participate in group work and are able to take responsibility for their own learning. There is good practice in the school, especially in the specialist status subjects, but in some lessons teaching fails to engage the students sufficiently well. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets all statutory requirements.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recently made appointments at senior and middle leader level have improved the capacity to improve, which is satisfactory. The school's senior leadership has well considered strategies in place which are beginning to bring about improvements. However, where monitoring lacks rigour the impact is not always evident in terms of measurable improvements in provision. The outcomes of monitoring are used inconsistently to raise the expectations of staff and students to meet challenging targets. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection with respect to the key issues but there are still areas which are not fully established across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of attainment particularly at Key Stage 4 and of boys.
- Improve the quality of teaching to increase the proportion of lessons in which pupils make good or better progress.
- Increase the rigour of monitoring, and use the outcomes more effectively, in order to raise teachers' expectations of what students can achieve and meet challenging targets.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter and leave the school with standards which are broadly in line with the national average. This means the majority make satisfactory progress from Year 7 to Year 11.

In 2006 14 year olds reached standards which were significantly above the national average in English, mathematics and science. In 2007 the provisional results show students reached even higher standards especially in English. This represents good progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make satisfactory academic progress.

By the age of 16, students reach standards in mathematics which are significantly above average. In English the standards reached by the students were significantly above average in 2005 and 2006, but fell in 2007. This fall was a major contributory factor in the school not achieving its target for 2007. The school provides an inclusive curriculum which meant all students in 2006 and 2007 left with a qualification. In 2007 girls did significantly better than boys at GCSE. In particular boys who entered the school with standards that were at the national average made significantly less progress than they should have done. Standards in information communication technology (ICT) at GCSE level, a weakness in the last inspection, have improved and are now satisfactory. The school's tracking of students' progress indicates it is on course to meet the targets it has set for 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The moral, social and cultural development of the students is satisfactory. It is enhanced through assemblies which encourage the students to think about their feelings, aspirations and place in the community. However, the spiritual aspect, which was an issue in the last inspection report, has seen little development. The school has good international links, particularly in raising funds for a school in Senegal. However, there is insufficient promotion of the awareness of multi-cultural Britain.

Behaviour is satisfactory both in class and around the school, and is improving because of the new policy. Nevertheless, a significant number of parents expressed concern over the behaviour of a minority of students in some classes and outside school. Attendance is currently satisfactory and the new system of following up unexplained absences and persistent absentees is beginning to reduce the number of unauthorised absences.

Healthy lifestyles are effectively promoted with the help of the school council and students participate fully in a wide range of extra-curricular sports activities. Although students are aware of the advantages of the healthy meals available in school, some Key Stage 4 students choose to eat less healthy options available from the local shops.

Students report bullying is infrequent, and quickly and efficiently dealt with. They state they feel safe in school. The school council plays an effective role in involving students in the running of the school and they confirm that their views are listened to, respected and acted upon. This is exemplified by students from the school council attending and making positive contributions to governors meetings. Students are able to develop the skills needed for future employment through the established personal, social, health and careers education (PSHCE) programme.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the majority of lessons students make satisfactory rather than good gains in their learning. In the better lessons students make good progress because it is clear what they are learning through a variety of activities well matched to their needs and interests. This maintains their interest and motivation

Students enjoy group and paired tasks which involve them in discussion. One group, for example, successfully used persuasive arguments to convince others to accept their views. Students also enjoy lessons when they are given the opportunity to apply their learning to real situations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively and discreetly supported by additional staff.

Parents and students feel adequately informed about their progress through dedicated days, reports and assessment tasks. There has been much progress in the use of assessment information to track students' progress by middle and senior leaders. The use of assessment data to develop teaching and learning is underdeveloped.

The specialist status has been well used to develop teaching and learning through the use of new technologies in modern foreign languages (MFL) and mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features. It is being changed to meet the students' needs and interests but it is still too early to evaluate whether this will improve achievement. Provision for ICT has improved since the previous inspection. However, insufficient time is given to ICT at Key Stage 3 which means some students are unable to achieve the higher levels.

Students participate in a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities including sport, drama and music, and after-school revision classes. Students of all abilities benefit from the learning resource centre (LRC) which is well attended. The proactive staff in the LRC foster positive attitudes to boys' reading, work hard to present cultural exhibitions that link with the curriculum and provide an inviting learning atmosphere for additional study. The specialist language status enables all students to follow at least one MFL course at Key Stage 4 with extra provision provided through early bird and twilight sessions. Strong links with primary schools have been developed through the specialist status.

Work-related learning and accreditation opportunities are provided through some strong links with partner schools, colleges and local businesses, enhanced through the specialist status. Enterprise education and work-related learning are integrated into the PSHCE programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care and support given to all students are strengths of the school. Staff work hard to promote a positive, caring and supportive environment which gives students a sense of being valued. Pastoral management places great emphasis on nurturing good relationships. This is acknowledged and appreciated by all students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable students receive very effective support for their social and emotional

development. The high levels of exclusion are being reduced through the use of the new behaviour policy. Many strategies are employed to ensure that transition arrangements between Year 6 and Year 7 are successful.

Much of the academic guidance and support given, through marking and assessment, is weak and does not provide the information the students need to develop their learning. Whilst there is good practice, too often comments do not enable the students to know what they have to do to improve their work. A new policy is in place but this has not been fully adopted by all departments. All safeguarding procedures are in place. Risk assessments are completed but the procedures are not standardised across the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Having recognised that the 2007 GCSE results were 'disappointing' the senior leadership team are now more focused on raising standards and achievement. There is a sense of common purpose amongst the senior and middle leaders that progress can be made. The targets set for 2008 are described as 'challenging but realistic' and the tracking data show the progress towards them being met. Recent appointments at senior and middle leadership level are bringing about much improvement in the school. Nevertheless, the senior leadership has not acted swiftly enough to deal with all the areas of concern and raise standards and achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4 and boys. This contributed to the challenging targets not being met in 2007. Governors are supportive of the school and have challenged the leadership and management about the 2007 GCSE results.

The large majority of parents were positive about the school but a small minority expressed concern over communication with the school and in particular the feedback they received about their concerns.

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. However, given the number of initiatives introduced in September 2007, and the need to embed many of them into day-to-day practice in all departments, the capacity to improve remains satisfactory.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Millthorpe School, York, YO23 1WF

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views about your school. Many of your parents completed a questionnaire which enabled us to take their views into account as well.

Millthorpe School is a satisfactory school. Your headteacher, and his staff, are committed to raising your achievement and are putting in place the opportunities for you to do so.

You told us that you particularly enjoyed lessons when you are able to work in groups and apply your learning. In these lessons you are more focused on what you have to learn and make better progress. You particularly enjoy the extra-curricular activities provided, especially physical education, and many of you attend these activities. You also stated you feel safe in school with the few incidents of bullying being dealt with swiftly. Your school council plays a significant role in the development of the school and you appreciate that your views are listened to, respected and acted upon.

We have asked Mr Wootton and the staff to:

- ensure that all of you, and in particular boys, leave the school at the end of Year 11 with better examination results
- develop interesting and challenging lessons to enable you to make good progress and achieve more
- monitor the changes being made to your education to make sure they result in you receiving a better education.

You can help by attending school every day, participating through the school council and acting on the advice your teachers will be giving you.